

CHAPTER IX COMMUNITY DESIGN



A. INTRODUCTION

Incorporated in 1734, Litchfield has an abundance of historical resources and has maintained its agricultural heritage to the present day. While the town itself is not urban, it is surrounded by some of the state's most urban communities and well-travelled routes such as the Charles Bancroft Highway (Route 3A). Litchfield also has a wealth of natural resources unique to the area including the iconic Merrimack River flowing along the town's western boundary.

There are businesses in the North and South end of Town but no box stores or large commercial developments. Aside from agriculture, the community is comprised mostly of single family homes. Over the past 50 years, Litchfield has experienced widespread residential development, and is expected to continue growing with the highest demand for new development existing in the residential sector.

Moving forward, residents would like to keep Litchfield looking pristine, have a role in shaping future growth, maintain community cohesiveness, and preserve the many resources the community and land have to offer. This chapter will discuss the vision for design and form as Litchfield continues to grow and presents policy statements representing the future as articulated by residents. It is to serve as a resource for Litchfield citizens, private business and for state and regional officials.

The Master Plan, prepared in accordance with New Hampshire RSA 674:1 through 674:4, is a policy statement intended to serve as a guide for future local land use regulation, transportation improvements, environmental protection and capital improvements. The following recommendations are to serve as a guidance document and are not regulatory.

B. SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

Current residents of Litchfield expressed their content with the character of the town and current land use patterns and would like to keep the town mostly agricultural and residential. Residents are most concerned with maintaining the agrarian history while seeking a balance of residential and commercial development. While preserving agricultural lands is a key priority, there is not a need to plan for additional farming areas as it is already allowed in all current zones.

Architectural Features

Residents would like to continue to articulate the traditional New England style of architecture. Features encouraged in new development include dormer windows, farmer's porches, capes, barns, and gable roofs. Variation from typical splits and colonials is welcomed.

New development is encouraged to match the style of the area and balance appropriateness of the site and good design. For example, where appropriate, front doors and entryways are encouraged to face the street. Residents frequently report that the tight knit community and neighbors is their favorite aspect of the Town. Homes clustered in neighborhoods can continue and further this community dynamic.



Continuing with the theme of preserving Litchfield's agricultural character, the Town is also encouraging the practice of restoring old barns. Barns have significant historical value and can be refurbished for continued use. Restoration of barns along Route 3A is especially desired. There are resources available for barn owners, such as the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance that provide information and assist with the process. Tax incentives are also available for the restoration of historic barns.

Photo taken from <http://design-net.biz>

Massing and Scale

Traditional New England details that break up massing are desirable. Dormers, farmer's porches, variation in materials, and broken up rooflines continue the traditional character of the Town. Peaked and gabled roof-lines reflect local character, opposed to flat roof lines without detail. In addition to traditional two-story homes, single story houses promote and enable aging in place as well as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). Houses with multiple stories can create a barrier for older populations or those with mobility difficulties.

Variety

Single-family homes are the predominant style of housing found in Litchfield. The vision for the Town's future is to have a diverse housing stock that provides residents with more options for types of living spaces. To achieve a wider variety of housing that appeals to different demographics, Litchfield encourages consideration of single-family home alternatives such as starter homes, workforce housing, condominiums, condexes, affordable lower cost housing, manufactured homes, two-family homes/duplexes, and single-story homes in future residential development. In doing so, blending alternative housing styles with the existing historic character of the area and/or the surrounding properties is also encouraged.

Parking

Where feasible, it is encouraged to turn garage structures sideways, so the doors are hidden or visually minimized. Small garages resembling barns are also recommended. The intent is to create a welcoming environment where the front entry is prominent and places greater design emphasis on people rather than cars.

Landscaping

Maintaining a green, country, idyllic community is a primary community design goal. Preservation of existing mature trees maintains and protects this aesthetic. Cleared areas within new development are encouraged to be seeded and landscape plans include a variety of native tree, shrub and plant species to create natural buffers between homes and from the street.



Solar Panels

Use of solar panels in a residential setting has become very popular in recent years. The Town of Litchfield encourages use of all types of energy in an appropriate and aesthetically pleasing manner. To address safety concerns, especially of roof-mounted panels, building codes are to be followed at all times. It is also recommended that the fire department inspect roof-mounted solar panels. Property owners are encouraged to consider the impact of solar panels to abutting properties and practice proper buffering to prevent issues like glare.

C. MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

Architectural Features, Massing and Scale

As previously noted, Litchfield is predominantly characterized by single-family housing. The goal for multi-family housing is to mimic this scale and feel. There are several design techniques that help establish a smaller scale and aesthetic. Building articulation helps to break up large continuous building planes such as roofs and elevations. This can be achieved through simple means such as providing porches and entry porticos, breaking up the roofline with dormers, and creating off sets in the front elevation between individual units.

Site layout can arrange buildings and landscape features to reduce the number of buildings or the full scale of a structure in view from any one vantage point. Offsetting building alignment is one simple design tool to assist in breaking up the visual impact of larger structures. Design inspiration drawn from the historic New England “big house, little house, back house, barn” archetype can provide a model for large scale building that can accommodate several units within a structure, while still retaining a single-family and agricultural feel.



Variety

Selection of a variety of building materials and colors further helps to minimize the visual appearance of building massing and scale. For example, the combination of clapboard and shake style siding helps the minimize the visual impact of larger facades and helps to establish the look and feel of smaller scale single family homes. Selecting a mix of paint or siding colors similarly can create visual interest and break up a front façade when several different colors are selected for townhomes.

Landscaping

As noted above, well designed landscaping helps to minimize the visual impact of larger developments. Where feasible, existing mature trees should be retained to help provide visual buffering, a green environment and break up views. Where feasible, multi-family plans are encouraged to provide a front and back yard for homes. Clustering of buildings enables the retention of larger overall green and open spaces. Protection of stone walls and other existing natural and landscape features furthers the small-town feel.

Parking

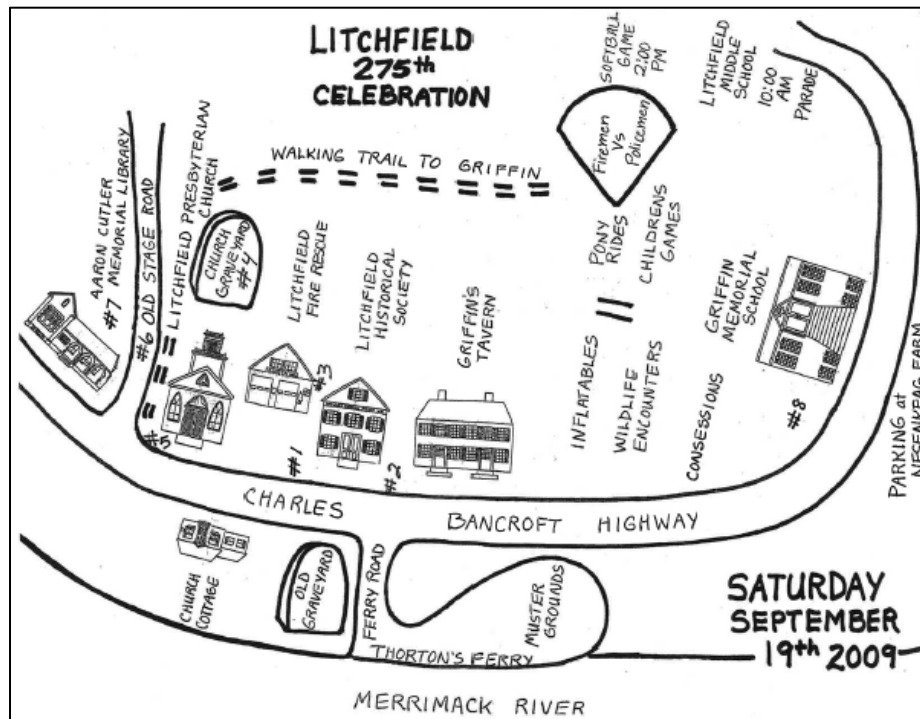
Parking areas can have a significant visual impact in multi-family developments and warrant careful attention in the design process. The primary goal is to minimize the visual impact of parking and paved areas, preferring instead to maximize green space. This might be accomplished by breaking up parking spaces into smaller areas separated by landscaping, using shared driveways in townhouse style developments, placing parking to the side or rear of each building, or using more traditional driveways and garages.

D. COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

As stated in the Future Land Use chapter, one goal is to create small scale commercial nodes. The existing commercially zoned areas the intersection of Albuquerque, Colby and Charles Bancroft Highway and a second node along the Route 102 are ideal locations for such commercial development. The northern node along Charles Bancroft Highway could support professional offices, assisted living, and other services. The Route 102 corridor is better suited to more highway commercial oriented development.



Although Litchfield lies in between larger municipalities, residents prefer smaller scaled cottage industry rather than traditional retail patterns. In the area of the Old Stage Road and Charles Bancroft Highway, the Town holds promoting and maintaining the present historic character a priority. The historic town center, home to the Aaron Cutler Memorial Library, the Litchfield Presbyterian Church, the old Fire Station, the old Town Hall, Griffin's tavern and the Griffin Memorial School, at the southernmost segment of Charles Bancroft Highway is part of the quintessential small-town agricultural feel along Route 3A that is cherished by residents and local businesses (depicted in the drawing below).



Above: A rendering of Litchfield's Historic Town Center for the 275th celebration

There is a high demand in Litchfield for a general store, a coffee shop, and an antique store. Residents would like to see some job opportunities to keep people in town. It has been also expressed that there is need for commercial development that provides services for the town's senior and elderly population. With an aging population, transportation options in Litchfield that connects with surrounding towns would be especially beneficial.

Massing and Scale

Larger structures, as might be found in the northern commercial and Route 102 nodes, are encouraged to use architectural and design features to break up mass. Examples of this include varying façade materials, broken up rooflines, porches, porticos, cornices, awnings, and other pedestrian scale details to break up large spans of walls and create a more aesthetically pleasing space. For two-story buildings and structures, glazing (windows and doors) is recommended to allow the building's interior to be visible to pedestrians. Where appropriate, commercial buildings are encouraged to use distinctive materials or colors with overhangs and awnings on the ground floor. Upper stories are also encouraged to encompass distinctive architectural features such as cornice lines, eaves, and gables that create a varied roofline.



Along the length of Route 3A, Litchfield residents would like to maintain agricultural character and the historic New England architectural style. Use of existing houses and agricultural structures is encouraged to promote the "county store" feel. Historic structures are urged to be preserved and repurposed as community needs

change. For example, structures such as the Griffin Memorial School (constructed in 1930), the old Town Hall (constructed in 1998), and the old Fire & Rescue Station (constructed in 1958) could be renovated to serve as a museum and cultural arts center or a community center.

Any commercial and light industrial development, as allowed at the northern and southern ends of town, is encouraged to be setback from the roadway. Longer driveways and extra landscaping is recommended to screen the development.



Landscaping

As stated in the previous section, setbacks for commercial buildings and structures are encouraged to be landscaped and driveways and parking areas encouraged to be screened. It is also recommended that setbacks are staggered where possible between developments to foster variety. It is important that open space be maintained as much as possible in developments. Avoidance of clear-cutting and controlled tree cutting is ideal. Retention of existing trees and landscaping to provide visual buffering where applicable is highly desired. Any additional attention provided to landscape buffers to separate commercial from residential development is appreciated.

Parking

Like residential development, front doors and entryways are encouraged to face the street where appropriate. It is also recommended that commercial developments encourage walkability and pedestrian connectivity, while also maintaining a green environment.

E. LANDSCAPE AND OPEN SPACE

Maintain Rural and Agricultural Character

Maintaining Litchfield's rural character as well as conservation are two major goals for the Town's residents. As Litchfield continues to grow, residents would like to see green space incorporated into new development and minimal tree cutting and clearing. Preserving agricultural areas as well as protecting open space and wildlife is highly encouraged moving forward.



As mentioned in the Future Land Use chapter, Litchfield will continuously work to keep the Route 3A corridor agricultural. Keeping the west side of 3A as agricultural land for the future is extremely important to both residents and business owners in Litchfield; making the town unique to other towns in the region.

While opinions were mixed, the majority felt the best way to preserve additional areas in Litchfield was through conservation easements rather than additional regulations. However, some farms were concerned that easements limit options for future generations. The town could develop a strategic plan to identify priority locations and interested landowners. The challenge to doing so however is there is limited, to no, investment at the state level to preserve farmland in Southern New Hampshire.

All future development is encouraged to incorporate existing trees and green space as much as possible. While the town is expected to grow and continue to be developed, agricultural continuity and open space conservation are Litchfield's driving factors in planning.

F. RECREATION

River Access

The Town is also working to improve access to the Merrimack River with recent increased resident interest. The river banks are too steep in Litchfield which impedes access to the river. The Town is interested in pursuing grants to establish easy public river access with a boat launch. Parks and green spaces accessible to the public along the river are also long-term goals.

Historic River's Edge Park

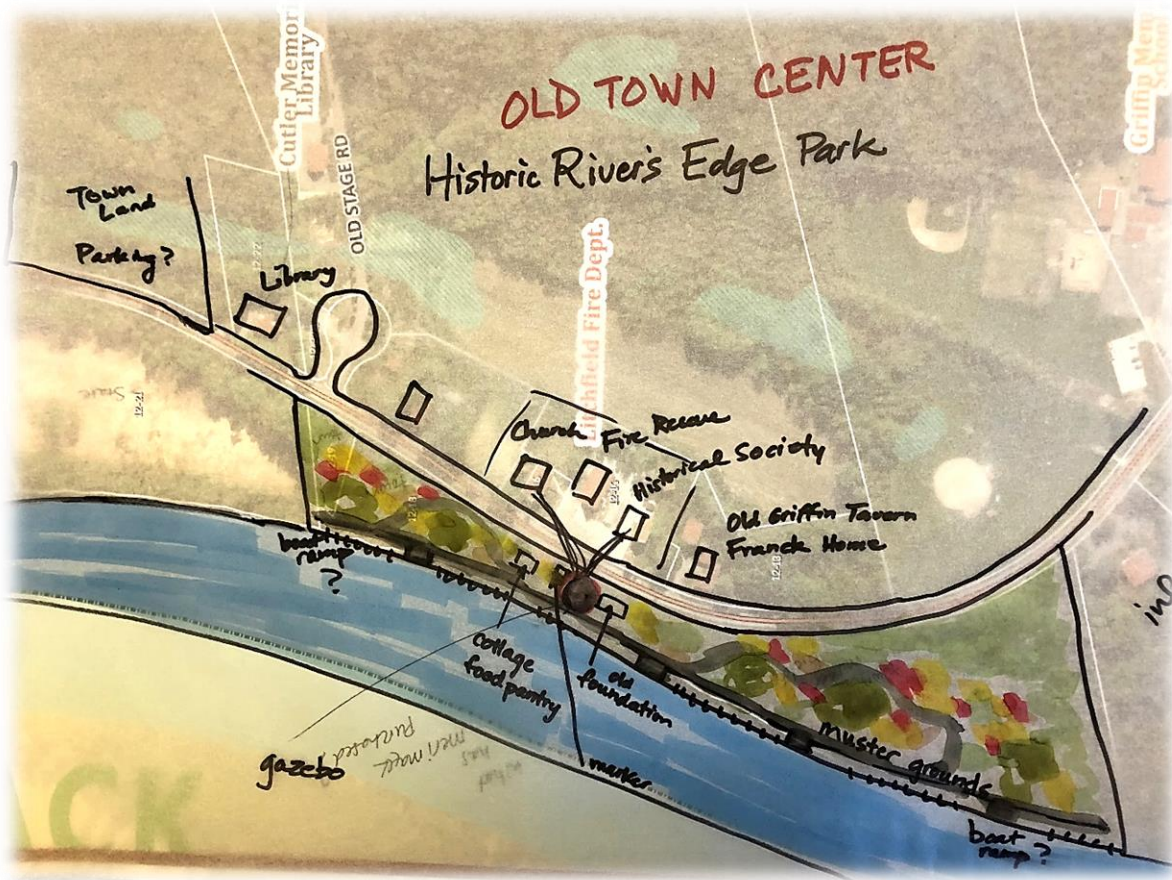
The historic, Old Town Center is the oldest intact and undeveloped Muster Grounds in the state of New Hampshire. A popular suggestion for future design is to memorialize this land into a historic river's edge park. In fact, the Town of Merrimack is developing a river's edge park in the same location on the other side of the river, so a park in Litchfield would fit in nicely in this area. Because river access is in high demand amongst residents, incorporation of a Riverwalk trail is encouraged. Fences or a tree buffer along the riverbank side of trail are recommended to combat bank erosion and ensure safety. Lookouts onto the river from the trail could draw more visitors as well.



The current condition of the property needs attention. The area is overgrown with weeds and vines and will need to be cleared for future use. Perhaps local landscaping companies or boy scout troops would be interested in volunteering time to rehabilitate the area. Perennials and other plantings would also add a lot of aesthetic value to the space, local farms or a garden club might be another asset for potential donations. Traffic calming measures along Route 3A are highly desired to keep visitors safe when crossing the street between the library and Muster Grounds.

Some suggestions for the new park space include trees and picnic tables scattered throughout park land as well as a gazebo centered across the street from the historical buildings. The gazebo could be decorated for holidays and could possibly incorporate a large band stand. There has also been interest in incorporating historical/informative signage and plaques at this riverside park like those found at Moore's falls installed by local boy scouts. Grants are currently being researched for funding options.

Photo attribution: Adam's River viewing platform in British Columbia This photo is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported](#) license, photo attribution: Jack Borno.



Above: The Litchfield Planning Board held a work session in April of 2018 where ideas for future design concepts of the Old Town Center and Historic River's Edge Park were discussed. The picture above is a sketch of ideas generated at this session.

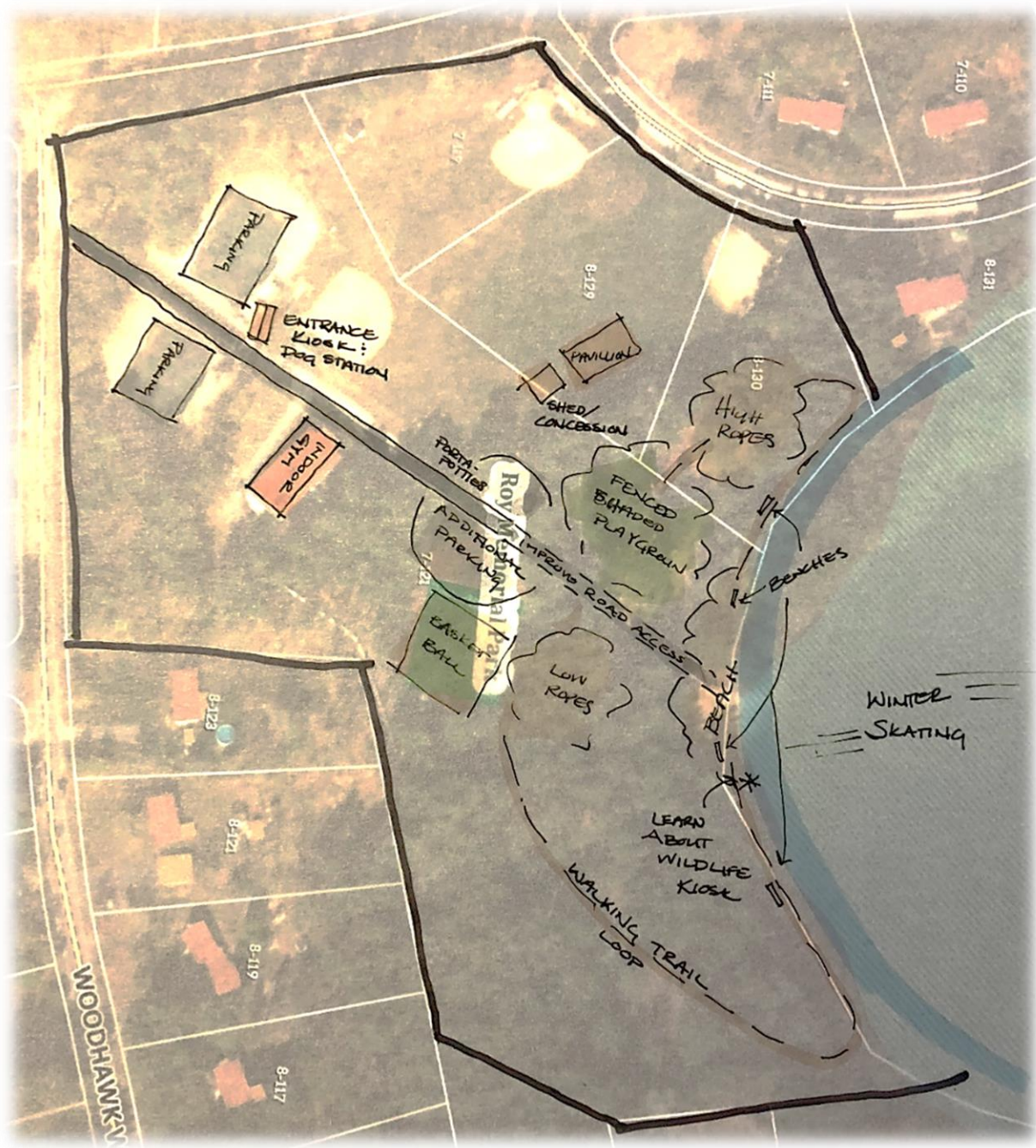
Darrah Pond Improvements

Darrah Pond is iconic in the Town of Litchfield serving as a community recreation and activity center. It has been expressed by the community that Darrah Pond needs to be revitalized and revamped to include more activities for young families.

As articulated in the Land Use Chapter, the Recreation Commission has an ongoing track record for implementing regular improvements as time and resources permit. The Community Center at Darrah Pond is considered a local gem that needs regular polishing. In addition to the recent work completed and noted above, there are a few other improvements that have been identified and are on the "to-do list" including a gravel road to the snack bar, install lights inside the pavilion and add new 3 phase electrical service near the main field for lighting for night games.

The following are suggestions based on resident feedback, and feedback from the Litchfield Recreation Commission:

- The Town should consider removing old and diseased pine trees around the ropes courses. This will improve the aesthetics of that area and eliminate a safety risk.
- Clean up and dredge the beach area, and possibly add new sand.
- Repair the playground and include equipment for a wider range of age groups.
- Because Darrah Pond is more of a kettle pond, with no water flowing in or out, there are a lot of issues with algae blooms. Unfortunately, this causes Darrah Pond to be unsafe for swimming most of the time. There is a lot of resident interest in installing a splash pad, because it would provide a safe and consistent opportunity for children to play in water during the summertime.
- Add a dock to Darrah Pond. Fishing is very popular, so a dock would appeal to many visitors.
- Add more benches and picnic tables, especially in sunny areas and around the playground area. All of the current benches and picnic tables are located in shady areas and there are no benches near the playground. It is highly recommended that all seating and tables are bolted down as well.
- Incorporate a band stand so there are music opportunities and event possibilities.
- Add more activity areas to the property, such as BBQ pits, volleyball nets, and horseshoe pits
- Construct an indoor recreation facility that has multiple indoor fields, multiple indoor courts, and an indoor pool. Indoor facilities are in high demand by Litchfield residents, who are going to other towns to use them.
- Incorporate more winter recreation opportunities, such as ice skating in the pavilion.



Above: The Litchfield Planning Board held a work session in March of 2018 where ideas for future design concepts of Darrah Pond were discussed. The picture above is a sketch of ideas generated at this session.

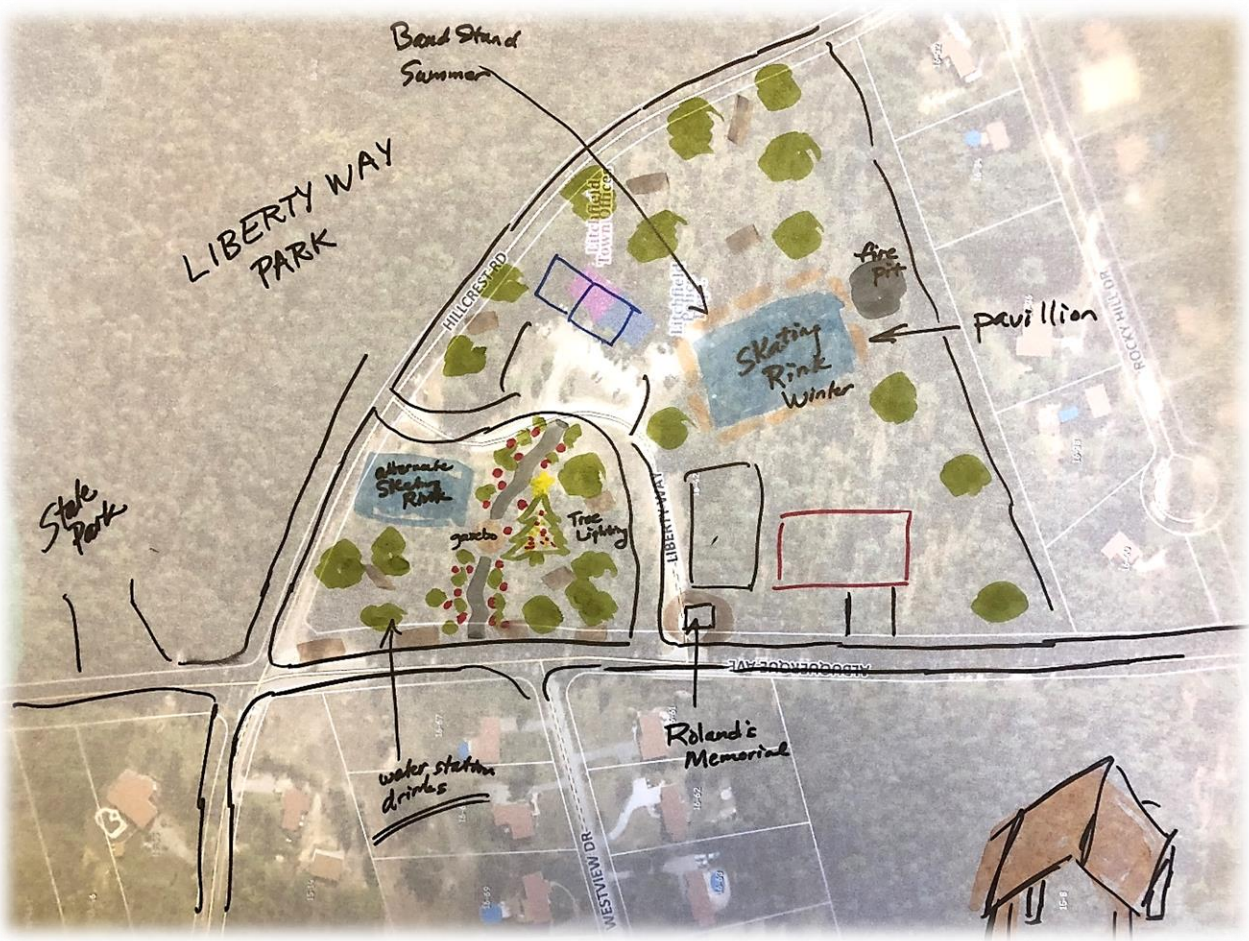
Town Hall/Liberty Way Park Visioning

Liberty way is an ideal location to create a public space not only because of the Town Hall traffic but also because it is the mid-way point of the popular Albuquerque bike path. This space could possibly present opportunities to bring money into the Town for hosting attractions, marketing agriculture, or even small vendors such as an ice cream stand. However, some initial general maintenance will be necessary before transforming the space. More landscaping is also encouraged.

More amenities would be beneficial to this area as well. Simple projects, like adding benches along Albuquerque and scattering picnic tables in wooded areas would create added value for visitors and people living in the area. Play structures for children, especially a big fire truck and police car since the departments are located in this area, could be considered. Another idea would be embrace more natural play structures. For example, adding in art sculptures to the park that can also be climbed on, similar to those at the Andres Institute of Art in Brookline, NH or The Awakening sculpture in Maryland.



Many residents also desire a town skating rink. A skating rink could easily be incorporated in the Liberty Way park area due to its close proximity to the new fire department and their ability to flood the rink. Constructing a pavilion or sheltered structure would be ideal, since it could double as a protected skating rink in the winter and and serve as a bandstand in the summer. It could also be used for other town gatherings, such as Christmas Tree lightings. The Planning Board suggests searching for grants as a funding source for the Liberty Way park.



Above: The Litchfield Planning Board held a work session in April of 2018 where ideas for future design concepts of Town Hall and the Liberty Way Park were discussed. The picture above is a sketch of ideas generated at this session.

Gathering Places / Community Opportunities

Residents have stated that one of the best parts of living in Litchfield is the strong sense of community and comradery with other residents. Creating community gathering places is essential in promoting community interaction and creating social impacts.

Gazebos were identified as a desirable architectural addition to public spaces and are encouraged in future parks and commercial developments to provide a gathering point for residents. Similarly, parks are recommended to incorporate picnic tables, seating, and focal points that provide a gathering point for residents.



Another desirable gathering place identified by residents is a large community center that will provide opportunities like pools and courts. Currently residents must travel to other towns to use such facilities. Litchfield residents have also been hoping for a small-town general store or a coffee shop in the center of town. Ideally, a community center and general store/coffee shop should encompass the surrounding architectural aesthetics and character.

In addition, to incorporate the theme of re-using old buildings, the old fire station building could potentially be repurposed as a public facility or a store. This historical building located in the center of town is a huge asset and should not be forgotten as the town moves forward.

G. SIGNAGE

Signage can play a large role in the overall aesthetics and character of a community. Signage design can significantly improve community aesthetics and cut down on visual clutter. Signs can also be used to promote the community and create a sense of place, such as welcome signs at town lines. Another important role of signage is promoting safety, whether the sign itself is cautionary or that the design encourages legibility, optimal placement, and correct usage of lighting as to not blind drivers. Litchfield would like to promote several design components and uses, as detailed below.

Welcome Signs

Litchfield currently has a ‘welcome’ sign at the Litchfield/Hudson town line. There are also granite signs (pictured above) at the north and south ends of town. As the town continues to be developed, welcome signs are encouraged on all major routes into Litchfield at the town line. The newly established Heritage Commission (at the 2018 Town meeting) could serve as a good resource for signs in the future.



Commercial/Industrial Signage

All Commercial/Industrial signage is encouraged to incorporate the traditional New England colonial style. Ideally, signs should speak both to architecture of the building it is pertaining to and to the surrounding area's character. When a sign with changeable content is being considered, such as letterboard, alternatives such as sidearm hanging signs (pictured right on the right-hand side of the Steve Normanton Grass-fed Beef sign).



Regarding sign content, use of font type, size, and colors that promote clarity and legibility are highly desirable. The Town of Litchfield also asks that ADA guidelines are considered when designing signage. Colors that are friendly to those who are colorblind and simple, sans serif fonts in a medium or bold weight are encouraged.



Recreational Signs

In future planning, it is strongly encouraged that all town parks have similar signage with the same type of layout. The purpose of this would be to make town owned parks both easily recognizable and uniform. Darrah Pond and Sawmill Brook currently have visually appealing signs that serve as good examples (The Sawmill Brook Park sign is pictured to the left).



Wildlife Crossing Signage

As an agricultural town with a lot of green space, Litchfield is home to a great deal of wildlife. The Town and its residents are very fond of the wildlife and consider it a highlight of living in the area. In efforts to promote safety of both the wild animals and those travelling on the roads, Litchfield would like to promote the use of wildlife crossing signs at all necessary areas. Using such signs could reduce wildlife-vehicle accidents by alerting drivers about the potential or actual presence of animals in the road.

H. TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Looking to the future, Litchfield has several goals for transportation functionality and infrastructure aesthetics. Overall, residents would like transportation to mesh with the Town's agricultural character. For example, rural roads are encouraged to be lined with split fences, similar to those on Albuquerque Avenue, instead of having large or obstructive walls. Residents would also like to see minimal tree cutting in any case of new infrastructure development.

Regarding walking and cycling networks, the community has identified the need for all of the schools to be connected by sidewalks. At the moment, the middle school is disconnected from the other school buildings. In addition, the multi-purpose path that creates a loop through Pinecrest Road, Hillcrest Road and NH Route 3A is very popular and considered to be a huge asset for residents. Conservation and upkeep of the path are highly recommended to maintain this integral part of the transportation system.

For vehicular transportation, Litchfield would like to move toward using rotaries where possible. Rotaries would help minimize traffic lights and are a good alternative to typical intersections regulated by traffic signals. Rotaries have been successfully incorporated into surrounding communities, like the town of Pelham (shown right), and not only are efficient but they can also be very aesthetically pleasing.



I. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Planning Board recommends the following initiatives:

- Maintain the rural/agricultural character of the town as well as the tight-knit residential community.
- Promote river access and green space/parks along the river's edge.
- Conserve green space and town owned land.
- Support a healthy community and high quality of life by continuing to provide opportunities for farms, parks, and walking/bike trails.
- Develop attractive transportation infrastructure that is efficient both internally in the Town of Litchfield but also externally providing multiple connections to other areas.
- Promote the re-use of historical buildings in the community, especially if they can be renovated to support public uses.

J. CONCLUSION

Litchfield is a picturesque example of a charming New England town. As an old agricultural community, the town embodies the rural and small-town experience with farmland, a tight-knit community, and a rich agricultural history. In contrast, Litchfield also offers all the conveniences that come with being located near some of New Hampshire's larger urban centers, like Manchester. Not surprisingly, the town of Litchfield has experienced widespread residential growth and development. By developing this master plan chapter, the community has created a desirable vision of future town aesthetics and design. Residents and the town government can use this vision and work together to achieve it as Litchfield continues to grow and develop.